

Chapter 4:

Tourism Strategy for 2008-2012

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Vision for Tourism and Recreation by 2012

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to determine Montanans' desire for what tourism should become by 2012, and then identify a path to get there. A vision is a description of a desired future – and it should be visionary. Below are the elements of the vision for tourism in Montana in 2012. This vision was developed by Montanans during public meetings held around the state in Fall 2006.

It is the year 2012. Tourism and recreation in Montana have achieved the following:

Balance. Tourism revenues continue to increase year-round. Montana's unique character and sense of place are retained while providing quality experiences for both residents and nonresident visitors. Montana's rich natural, historic and cultural assets are managed for sustainable levels of visitation in a manner consistent with responsible, shared use. Communities that desire tourism are benefiting from new revenue and jobs, while retaining their community integrity and heritage. Montana is known for its diverse, high quality natural, historic, and cultural tourism and recreation experiences, and the friendly professionalism of its people.

Cooperation. Effective public-private-nonprofit-tribal partnerships are engaged in visionary, collaborative planning and implementation efforts which foster economic growth and stability, while respecting the values of Montanans. The private sector, community development organizations, supporting public agencies, and the nonprofit sector are working as a team, tapping limited resources more effectively through their strategic, collaborative efforts.

Support. Sufficient financial and technical assistance are available from various sources to support effective tourism marketing and research, management of natural, historic, and cultural assets, and business development. Tourism is integrated into Montana's education and workforce training systems. An adequate workforce is available to support the tourism and recreation industry, and there is affordable housing for the workforce. Stable funding sources that do not diminish tourism marketing funds are available to develop and maintain infrastructure for tourism and recreation needs.

Respect. Tourism is recognized as an essential element of Montana's economy. It is appreciated by Montana citizens and elected officials for its financial and social contributions to the State. Cities have been provided tools to cover the costs of impacts from tourism. Lasting legacies from historical and cultural events such as the Lewis & Clark and David Thompson Bicentennials continue to benefit Montana residents and provide ongoing opportunities for businesses and visitors.

Accountability. A comprehensive evaluation system is being used to measure the success and impacts of tourism and recreation development and marketing, consistent with the strategic goals. Information about visitation trends, impacts, and visitor research are widely distributed to provide businesses and agencies facts needed to make good management decisions, and to be responsive to changing customer tastes and preferences.



Montana Tourism and Recreation Charter

(Draft Charter being developed by TAC subcommittee for review at October TAC meeting.)

Geo-Tourism

Geo-tourism is "Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of the place being visited - its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well being of its residents." Geo-tourism focuses not just on "tourist satisfaction," but on "tourist enthusiasm."

Geo-tourism emphasizes the distinctiveness of its locale, beneficial to visitor and resident alike.

Principles of Geo-tourism (National Geographic Institute for Sustainable Destinations)

Community involvement: Base tourism on community resources to the extent possible, encouraging local small businesses and civic groups to build partnerships to promote and provide a distinctive, honest visitor experience and market their locales effectively.

Community benefit: Encourage micro-to medium-size enterprises and tourism business strategies that emphasize economic and social benefits to involved communities, especially poverty alleviation, with clear communication of the destination stewardship policies required to maintain those benefits.

Protection and enhancement of destination appeal: Encourage businesses to sustain natural habitats, heritage sites, aesthetic appeal, and local culture. Prevent degradation by keeping volumes of tourists within maximum acceptable limits. Seek business models that can operate profitably within those limits.

Land use: Anticipate development pressures and apply techniques to prevent undesired overdevelopment and degradation.

Evaluation: Establish an evaluation process to be conducted on a regular basis by an independent panel representing all stakeholder interests, and publicize evaluation results.

Guiding Principles for Tourism and Recreation Development

Montana businesses, citizens, and stake-holder groups who participated in the planning process expressed that tourism in Montana should be a high quality experience which respects and celebrates Montana's unique heritage and character. They also want tourism to be sustainable: tourism should contribute to the economy without sacrificing long-term benefits for short-term profits. Tourists should not degrade the state's extraordinary natural, historic, and cultural assets.

Therefore, the Montana Tourism & Recreation Strategic Plan is guided by the following six principles. These guiding principles reflect the values, or "moral compass," expressed by Montana citizens in the public meetings, online survey, and other outreach efforts conducted by the planning team. They are the criteria against which tourism and recreation strategies are evaluated and prioritized. In brief, all programming and actions should adhere to these guiding principles.

- ◆ Serve the needs of Montanans first: retain Montana's character, sense of place and assets while providing economic benefits for citizens and businesses.
- ◆ Manage for sustainable, high-quality visitor experiences: practice good stewardship.
- ◆ Maximize economic and social benefits by targeting high-value, low impact visitors.
- ◆ Retain local control of decision-making about types and quantities of tourism development and visitors.
- ◆ Respect diverse needs, perspectives and concerns in tourism planning and promotion.
- ◆ Collaborate to resolve issues through positive, inclusive, solutions-based processes.

At the June 2007 Tourism Advisory Council meeting, the Council also endorsed the principles of Geo-tourism as a foundation for actions included in the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan (see box at left).



Goals for Tourism and Recreation 2008-2012

The following are the goals for Montana tourism and recreation from 2008 to 2012, toward which action will be focused to attain the vision. The goals are based on top priority issues and opportunities identified by Montanans during public meetings and a statewide online survey.

Goal 1: Increase four-season tourism revenues statewide through effective marketing and promotions, focusing on high-value, low-impact visitors

Goal 2: Attain public policy and citizen support for sustainable tourism and recreation.

Goal 3: Address management and access issues for sustainable recreation on state and federal lands.

Goal 4: Enhance and preserve Montana's culture and history (historic sites, museums, art, music, etc.).

Goal 5: Support appropriate business growth, including new tourism products and services for target customer markets.

Goal 6: Address tourism and recreation professional development, workforce availability, and affordable housing issues.

Goal 7: Improve Montana's transportation system for both residents and visitors.

Goal 8: Enhance the "curb appeal" of Montana communities to attract visitors.

Goal 9: Enhance funding to maintain sustainable tourism and recreation in Montana.

Goal 10: Build an effective "team" to implement the Strategic Plan, and report results

* "High-value, low-impact visitors" are defined as visitors who seek a quality experience, stay longer, spend more per day, and respect Montana's natural and cultural assets.



Promotion, Product and Partnerships

To accomplish the ten goals, specific actions have been identified for each goal (see list of actions beginning on page 38). The actions were determined by input from the statewide public meetings, interviews with tourism and recreation industry stakeholders, the online survey, and other outreach by the planning team.

The actions can be grouped into three categories: Promotion, Product, and Partnerships.

Promotion includes advertising, publicity, and other promotion activities targeting nonresident travelers, as well as awareness-building efforts targeting Montana residents and elected officials.

Product refers to the natural, cultural, and historic assets of Montana that travelers wish to experience, along with the facilities and services provided by Montana's tourism and recreation businesses, tribes, and agencies.

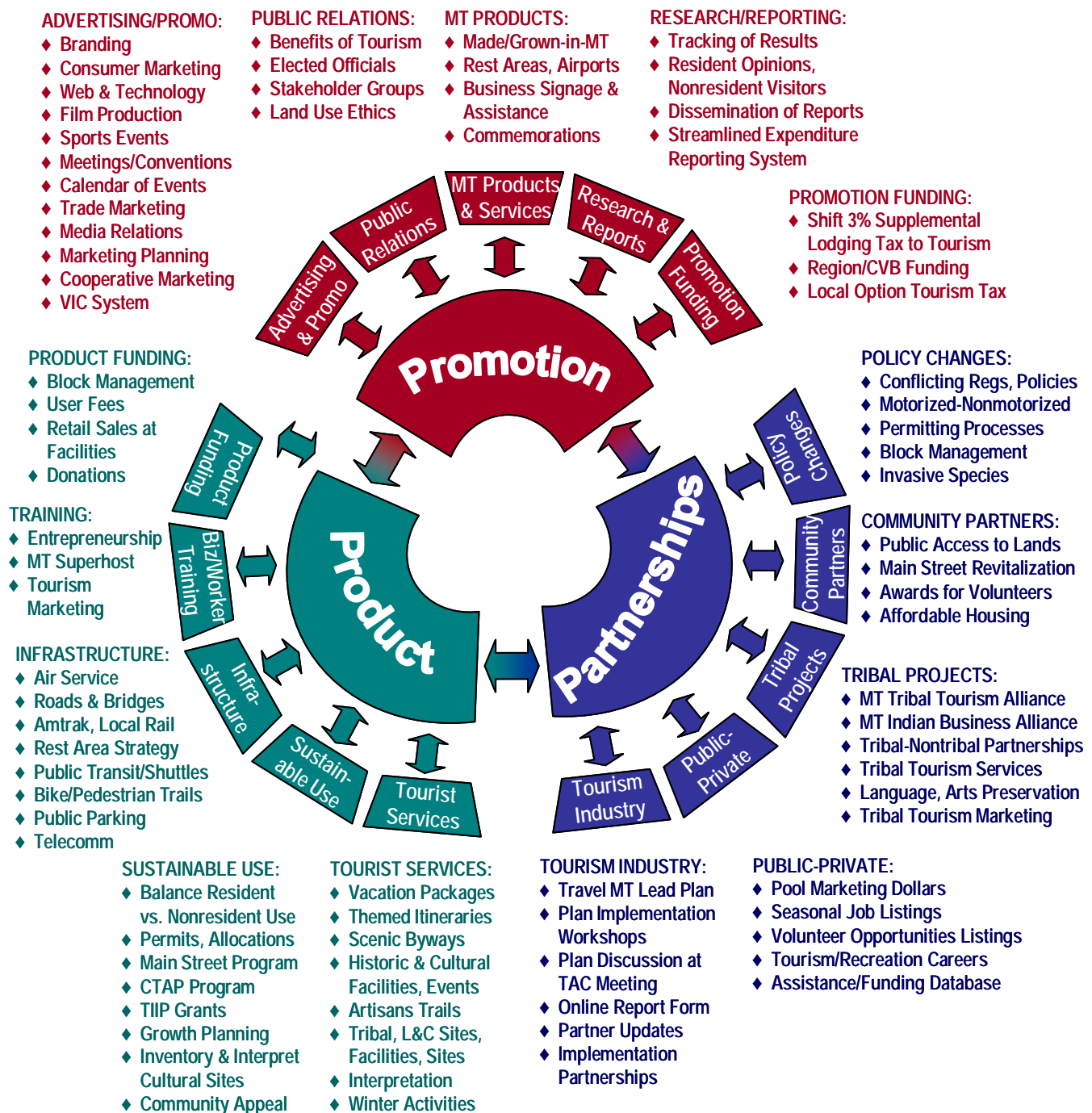
Partnerships are essential to implementation of the Strategic Plan, by leveraging resources, changing policies and procedures to increase effectiveness, and addressing challenges faced by the tourism and recreation industry.

The graphic on the next page summarizes the key action areas and specific actions in each category.



Strategic Framework

The Strategic Framework for the Tourism Plan consists of three main elements: Promotion, Product, and Partnerships. The graphic below shows five key themes within each category, and an overview of the actions within each theme. The three elements of the Framework are inter-related, in that without products, there would be nothing to promote; without promotion, there would be no tourism development; and without partnerships, there would be no efficiency in promotion or product development.



Summary of Actions to Achieve Goals

Montana's ten tourism goals (page 35) are derived from key issues and opportunities identified by Montana citizens, businesses, and other tourism and recreation partners during statewide public meetings and surveys. The goals provide the framework for turning the tourism Vision into reality by 2012. To achieve each of the goals, specific actions were developed, along with lead responsibility, partners, priority level, and timeline for each action. The actions are listed on this page and the next in summary form.

Chapter 5 provides detailed descriptions of each action, including priority level and responsible partners to lead and assist with implementation. A table summarizing the actions with their priority level, timeline, and responsible parties is included in Chapter 6. Appendix C contains lists of the actions organized by the partner group sectors.



Goal 1: Increase four-season tourism revenues statewide through effective marketing and promotions, focusing on high-value, low-impact visitors.

Actions:

- 1.1 Implement highly targeted consumer advertising and promotion campaigns, based on strategic marketing plans, and track/report results.
- 1.2 Promote Montana to targeted groups and events, emphasizing off-peak season.
- 1.3 Work collaboratively with other tourism marketing partners to plan and implement priority marketing efforts.
- 1.4 Improve Visitor Information System to extend visitor stays and spending.

Goal 2: Attain public policy and citizen support for sustainable tourism and recreation.

Actions:

- 2.1 Build awareness through statewide publicity efforts about the benefits/impacts of tourism and uses of lodging tax.
- 2.2 Provide concise, visual briefings and presentations to policy makers and business groups about Montana tourism issues and benefits.
- 2.3 Change State law and rules to enable implementation of a Montana Scenic-Historic Byways program (and access to federal funding for byways).
- 2.4 Address ongoing and emerging tourism and recreation policy issues.

Goal 3: Address management and access issues for sustainable recreation on state and federal lands.

Actions:

- 3.1 Educate visitors about ethics and responsibilities on public and private lands, and use technology to encourage recreation in appropriate areas.
- 3.2 Coordinate state/regional/local tourism marketing efforts with state/federal land management strategies.
- 3.3 Support use of easements, county planning commissions, and agency planning efforts to maintain and improve public access to public recreation lands.
- 3.4 Continue to enhance the Montana Block Management Program, expanding public access to private lands.
- 3.5 Identify actions and initiatives to reconnect families and youth with the outdoors, and link outdoor programs with the No Child Left Behind education initiative.

Goal 4: Enhance and preserve Montana's culture and history (historic sites, museums, art, music, etc.).

Actions:

- 4.1 Promote Montana's existing historic and cultural assets for the enjoyment of residents and visitors.
- 4.2 Improve and maintain infrastructure, facilities, and services to support heritage and cultural tourism in Montana.
- 4.3 Continue efforts to preserve Montana Tribal culture.

Goal 5: Support appropriate business growth, including new tourism products and services for target customer markets.

Actions:

- 5.1 Cultivate opportunities to leverage private and public dollars to create tourism products and attract new tourist markets.

- 5.2 Provide information about technical and financial assistance available to tourism and recreation businesses.

Goal 6: Address tourism and recreation professional development, workforce availability, and affordable housing issues.

Actions:

- 6.1 Enhance professional development opportunities and requirements for staff and board members of Montana tourism and recreation-related organizations.
- 6.2 Improve systems to augment Montana's workforce for tourism and recreation.
- 6.3 Encourage use of local development incentives and tax credits for construction of affordable workforce housing.



Goal 7: Improve Montana's transportation system for residents and visitors.

Actions:

- 7.1 Increase air service to and from Montana cities.
- 7.2 Continue to implement Montana's rest area strategy.
- 7.3 Improve Montana roads and bridges; reduce maintenance backlogs.
- 7.4 Increase use of passenger rail and transit service in Montana.
- 7.5 Expand bike/pedestrian trail systems in and between Montana communities, and connections to trailheads on state/federal lands
- 7.6 Develop a user-friendly handbook to provide information about highway sign guidelines to businesses, attractions and other tourism-related groups.



Goal 8: Enhance the "curb appeal" of Montana communities to attract visitors.

Actions:

- 8.1 Increase the capacity of Montana communities to be competitive in tourism.
- 8.2 Implement improvements to make Montana communities more tourist-friendly.



Goal 9: Enhance funding to maintain sustainable tourism and recreation.

Actions:

- 9.1 Increase the amount of lodging tax funding available for targeted tourism marketing, and for tourism and recreation-related programs and facilities.
- 9.2 Foster opportunities to pool public and private marketing dollars.
- 9.3 Enhance funding for Tourism Region and CVB tourism marketing and development.
- 9.4 Expand the use of donations, entrance fees, book/gift/art sales, and other mechanisms at public historic and cultural attractions to generate revenues.

Goal 10: Build an effective "team" to implement the Strategic Plan, and report results.

Actions:

- 10.1 Recognize Travel Montana as the "Team Captain" to communicate with partners, and coordinate successful implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- 10.2 Create public/private/tribal partnerships for cooperative project implementation.
- 10.3 Implement regular Strategic Plan discussion and reporting mechanisms.
- 10.4 Continue to streamline the process of reporting of marketing projects, and expenditures to the TAC and Travel Montana by Tourism Regions and CVBs.
- 10.5 Obtain strategic research to inform tourism marketing, development, and policy decisions, and disseminate results to partners and policy-makers.



Tourism and Recreation Policy Issues of Note

This Tourism and Recreation Strategic Plan identifies ten goals, and specific actions to achieve each goal, to improve sustainable and responsible year-round tourism in Montana over the next five years. During the planning process, Montanans and the tourism industry identified ongoing and emerging policy issues of concern. These issues are multi-jurisdictional and require state/federal policy or regulatory action. They are too broad to address with a single action in the Strategic Plan. Therefore, they are highlighted in this section as topics for focused discussion, supported by resources of staff and funding, to develop statewide coordinated solutions. In some cases, the issues need attention at the federal level through agency channels, Congress, or organizations like the Western States Tourism Policy Council.



Top Priorities regarding Management of Montana Lands and Facilities

Source: Online Survey

1. Rivers and lakes
2. Access to public lands
3. State Fishing Access Sites
4. State Parks
5. Local historic or cultural sites/facilities
6. State-owned historical sites/facilities
7. Block Management Program
8. City/County-owned parks and recreation facilities

The policy discussion process is led by state and federal officials: Governor, state agency directors, legislators, congressional delegation, and federal agency directors. These leaders determine the approach to policy issues, and identify implementation partners. The Montana Tourism & Recreation Initiative (MTRI) is an existing group of Montana state and federal agency directors chartered to work collaboratively on tourism and recreation policy issues and projects. MTRI includes representatives from the Governor's office, Tourism Advisory Council, state and federal agency directors, and agency staff. The MTRI group is uniquely positioned to coordinate efforts among agencies to focus on policy issues, and identify strategic processes and solutions to resolve them. Businesses, property owners, community and tribal leaders, and nonprofit organizations need to participate in both the discussions and the management planning processes to help meet planning objectives and demonstrate the interrelated nature of tourism on Montana's economy and its resource rich heritage. The listing of the nine issues below is not prioritized.

POLICY ISSUE 1: Balancing resident and nonresident recreation use in land management decisions.

Montanans value their outdoor recreation and sportsmen's heritage. As nonresident visitation has increased, many Montanans feel that visitors are encroaching on their quality of life in some areas of the state at certain times of year. It is incumbent upon the entire tourism industry to be sensitive to this issue, and to participate in policy discussions and agency planning processes, so that marketing efforts can be adjusted to maintain a balance between tourism impacts and local quality of life. Policy-makers need to identify locations where balance is a concern, and support local solutions to resolve conflicts. Tourism and recreation impacts must be monitored with improved visitor data collection, which then can be reported to all partners so that management and marketing activities can be refined accordingly. An example of this issue is loss of hunting access for Montanans on private land to nonresident lessees. Changes to the block management program were suggested as a way to address this issue.

POLICY ISSUE 2: Managing natural, cultural, and historic resources on public and private lands.

In addition to balancing resident and nonresident use, resource managers and industry partners also must ensure that resources are not “loved to death.” In some areas, at certain times of year, policies are required to establish limits and systems of allocated use, in order to accommodate public recreation while protecting and restoring assets. Imposition of limits and allocations is rarely a popular policy decision, and the tourism industry needs to participate in these policy discussions to ensure the sustainability of both the resources and the tourism industry for the long term. Tourism businesses and marketing organizations can help protect resources by educating their customers about sustainable tourism values and low-impact visitation (leave no trace, respect for cultural sites/artifacts, pack in/pack out, use of fire pans and portable toilets, etc.), as well as local rules and regulations. By understanding and communicating the reasons behind the rules and regulations, tourism partners contribute to sustaining and protecting the resources of Montana.

Examples of increased management activities to reduce impacts are the Blackfoot and upper Madison Rivers, where Fish Wildlife & Parks and the BLM have established permits for competitive, commercial, and group uses as a means of monitoring high use levels and evaluating the need for additional controls, in collaboration with local law enforcement, adjacent landowners, and users, to achieve a balance of use and resource protection. An example of an action to reduce impacts is the new bus system in Glacier National Park, which reduced traffic on Going to the Sun Road by 20% in its first year of operation.

POLICY ISSUE 3: Remaining competitive as a global tourism destination, and reversing Montana’s loss of market share among destination travelers.

ITRR research conducted in 2005 revealed that Montana lost market share from 2001 to 2005 among destination vacation travelers. In 2007, Montana ranked 31st among State Tourism Offices in total spending on tourism marketing, with a State Tourism budget of \$9.5 million.¹ The national average spending among State tourism offices is \$15.3 million (50 states reporting). Compounding declining global stature is the situation of under utilization in hotels and other tourism facilities: 70% of Montana’s nonresident travelers visit from April to September, and only 30% from October to March.

Statewide, Montana had more than 4.6 million vacant hotel room nights in 2006, primarily in November through April, based on a statewide year-round hotel occupancy rate of 59.5%.² The 2006 average room rate was \$67.73 per night, so Montana had \$309 million worth of vacant hotel rooms, which if filled would have generated \$21.7 million in lodging tax revenue. In 2006, Montana was below the national occupancy rate of 64%, and significantly below the national average room rate of \$95.64. This situation of dramatic under utilized capacity creates instability in tourism industry revenues and jobs, and increases costs for supplies, labor, and facilities. Montana needs to regain competitiveness by improving its marketing reach, targeting niche markets to boost visitation among high value, low impact visitors, and addressing the issue of under utilization in off-peak seasons.

¹ Tourism Industry Association (TIA) 2006-2007 Survey of U.S. State and Territory Tourism Office Budgets

² Smith Travel Research, 2006



Top Attractions for Vacationers to Montana

*Source: ITRR 2001/2005
Nonresident Report*

1. Mountains and Forests
2. Open Space
3. Yellowstone National Park
4. Rivers
5. Glacier National Park
6. Lakes
7. Wildlife and Fish
8. Lewis & Clark Sites
9. History and Culture
10. Indian History & Culture

Top Sites Visited by Montana Travelers

*Source: ITRR 2001/2005
Nonresident Report*

1. Yellowstone National Park
2. Glacier National Park
3. Little Bighorn Battlefield
4. Flathead Lake State Park
5. Virginia City/Nevada City
6. L&C Interpretive Center
7. Bighole Battlefield
8. National Bison Range
9. Lolo Pass Interp. Center
10. Museum of the Rockies
11. Pompey’s Pillar
12. Missouri Headwaters S.P.

Regional tourism organizations and Convention & Visitor Bureaus (CVBs) are key partners with Travel Montana in marketing the state. In most states, CVBs are funded by local sales and lodging taxes, and provide the professional staff and marketing horsepower to generate thousands of bookings in areas with significant concentrations of hotel rooms, restaurants, meeting facilities, and other visitor amenities. In many states, including Montana, regional tourism organizations are funded by state lodging taxes, and provide general marketing and promotion for large geographic areas, including urban and rural areas, although the majority of the lodging taxes are generated in the urban areas. Limitations on funding options for Montana CVBs, and the extremely large geographic areas covered by the six Montana regional organizations, present challenges to effective marketing efforts. Montana needs to discuss and clarify the unique roles and priorities of the regions and CVBs, along with their challenges and opportunities, and determine how to build greater capacity within these organizations to increase their effectiveness. Regional boundaries also should be reviewed in the context of the actual travel patterns of destination travelers.

POLICY ISSUE 4: Maintaining and enhancing tourism and recreation-related facilities and infrastructure (roads, restrooms, visitor centers, historic sites, parks, etc.).

Growth in nonresident visitation (and in Montana's population) means increased demand for facilities and services, which requires capital investment and higher levels of maintenance and operations funding. Montana's marketing strategy is to target high value, low impact visitors such as geotourists, who respect natural and cultural resources. These visitors also expect high quality facilities and amenities, and they are willing to pay for them: investments in facility upgrades often result in significant increases in revenue-generating potential. Strategies to sustain the network of visitor centers and museums in Montana will help support the investments that have been made in these facilities. Policy makers, tourism industry representatives, and facility managers should continue to discuss options to address increasing facility needs driven by growing visitor demand.



"We know from other states that ATVs used in hunting can create conflicts. In Montana, with more land base and fewer people, we can take steps now to head off some of the contentious situations other, more populated states, are running into."

*- Bob Walker
FWP Trails Program Coordinator*

POLICY ISSUE 5: Providing areas for sustainable motorized and non-motorized recreation, and identifying trail systems and loop trails for use by both residents and visitors.

Baby Boomers have aged, become more affluent, and realized increasing limitations in their physical capabilities. As a result, many Boomers who enjoy hiking, backpacking, and cross-country skiing now also participate in ATV and snowmobile touring. Montana and other states are experiencing higher levels of interest in multi-modal recreation, as well as conflicts between recreationists who prefer motorized and non-motorized means of conveyance. Agency planning efforts, such as U.S. Forest Service Travel Planning, attempt to provide motorized recreational opportunities in ways that reduce conflicts with non motorized recreation, and minimize negative and irreversible impacts to resources. Responsible travel planning protects wildlife species that are vital to wildlife viewers and hunters, and helps maintain habitat and healthy ecosystems.

Other states have developed successful designated motorized and non-motorized trail systems that cross jurisdictional land boundaries (state, federal, county, private, tribal, etc.). In Montana, a statewide proactive and strategic approach is needed to identify opportunities to foster communication and cooperation between land managers,

property owners, and trail user groups. Partnerships should be developed to address the increasing demand by identifying and promoting trail systems and loop routes for recreational touring in appropriate areas.

An example of a successful project for motorized and nonmotorized recreation involving local, state (DNRC) and federal (U.S. Forest Service) lands is the Whitefish “Trail Runs Through It” project, which includes policies for motorized uses on parts of the trail, and reduces trail conflicts between user groups

POLICY ISSUE 6: Preventing introduction and spread of noxious weeds and other invasive species through partnerships and educational efforts.

Montana State University coordinates Montana's Statewide Noxious Weed Awareness and Education Campaign (www.weedawareness.org), a coalition of state, federal, private, tribal, and nonprofit entities. However, more education is needed to inform visitors and residents about prevention methods and control measures to eradicate weeds and other invasive species. Tourism businesses need to become more engaged in the battle, using a collaborative and pre-emptive approach that provides information to travelers *before* they arrive in Montana. Web sites, visitor guides, podcasts, and other outdoor recreation promotion efforts should include an invasive species awareness message, in collaboration with the public and nonprofit sector partners. Opportunities for public-private partnerships should be explored, such as cost-sharing of tourism promotions with matching funds to include a weed awareness message. County noxious weed Extension Specialists should communicate with local and regional tourism groups to coordinate efforts.



POLICY ISSUE 7: Resolving conflicting state and federal agency regulations and policies related to tourism and recreation.

State and federal policies and regulations related to a single issue often differ significantly among various agencies, and in some cases, among different management units of the same agency. To the extent possible, the most cumbersome policy differences should be identified, based on input from user groups, and collaborative discussions held to resolve differences and conflicts. Additionally, there are opportunities to better serve visitors through value-added outdoor experiences provided by outfitters and other business partners. However, cumbersome and inconsistent permitting processes often hinder such opportunities, or make them economically unviable. Areas where permitting processes can be streamlined, and/or consistency improved across agency jurisdictions, should be identified and pursued. Examples are the successful collaboration between Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks and the BLM to resolve policy differences in Missoula, and create a single permit for use of various agency facilities.

“The management of natural resources has a direct impact on our cultural institution. The way they are maintained, conserved, and managed is a deciding factor in whether visitors come to our area. Everyone must work together to draw visitors to Montana.”

- Survey Respondent



POLICY ISSUE 8: Developing wildlife-related recreation activities (e.g., wildlife watching, birding trails, etc.).

In Montana and nationally, non-consumptive wildlife-oriented recreation is a growing activity and a significant source of tourism visitation. However, most state wildlife management agencies derive the majority of their funding from hunting and fishing licenses, fees and tags. Demand is growing for other wildlife-related recreation opportunities, without commensurate funding to provide them. Agency managers and policy makers need to assess existing conditions, and identify opportunities to enhance wildlife programs for these emerging and under-served wildlife interests. New fee-based programs can improve wildlife recreation opportunities while simultaneously bolstering resource conservation by supporting efforts like conservation easements.



POLICY ISSUE 9: Encouraging families and youth to spend more time enjoying outdoor recreation activities.

Tourism in Montana is highly dependent on outdoor recreation. However, national trends indicate declining interest among many population groups – most alarmingly children – to participate in outdoor recreation (camping, fishing, hiking, etc.). Initiatives have begun around the country, including Montana, to address this issue of reconnecting youth with the outdoors, and Montana's Governor serves as co-chair of a national task force focused on this topic and led by The Conservation Fund. Examples of current efforts in various states/cities include Take It Outside, No Child Left Inside, Kids in the Woods, Outdoor Education Initiative, Get Fit With Us, Healthy Kids-Healthy Forests, Move Missoula, etc. In some areas, outdoor activities for kids are coordinated with science, math and language programs related to No Child Left Behind education initiatives. However, transportation, fuel costs, programming, curriculum development, and the identification of appropriate activities often are barriers to such programs. In addition to state and federal agencies, other groups involved include University Extension 4-H programs, Boys & Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts of America, conservation and sportsmen's organizations, civic service clubs, churches, etc. To ensure future customers for its outdoor recreation-based tourism product, Montana should engage MTRI to coordinate dynamic youth-oriented efforts, and engage teens and younger children in the process.

At first it was like a mission of discovery...to follow the maps of images in our virtual world to find the REAL thing. Now, we just like being outside. It is so retro!

- Geeksinthewoods.com

GEEK: Gaming Environmentally
Educated Kid